



The Bethel Courier.

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Fall 1984

Bethel Historical Society

HIGH STREET THROUGH THE YEARS

by Geraldine S. Howe

Editor's note: This paper was presented at the monthly meeting of the Bethel Historical Society in March 1983 and has been revised for publication in this issue. The author wishes to thank all those who provided assistance with the research.

The origins of High Street extend back to the 1850s when Gilman Chapman deeded a two rod right of way from Main to Church Street.

1. This site (beginning at the Mechanic Street end of High Street on the right) was the Sash & Blind Factory of Cyrus W. Buck, Moses C. Foster and Thomas Holt in 1858. What happened here between this time and 1882 is not well-known but the *Oxford County Advertiser* for September 22, 1882 records the fact that Ebenezer Richardson & Son were "shingling their steam mill" on this site. In April 1884, the *Advertiser* reported that "E. Richardson & Son were not able to run their mill part of last week on account of water settling under the mill." An item in the *Advertiser* for July 1886 reported that "E. Richardson & Son are manufacturing ten thousand packing boxes for the corn shop." In 1887, the *Advertiser* recorded that "J. J. Estey, late of Boston, has anchored his photograph salon in Richardson's mill yard for a week or two and is prepared to take fine pictures." Richardson was operating the mill in January 1891 according to an item in the *Advertiser* since he had "a large amount of birch" at his mill. The next person to own the site was Charles Martin who transferred it to Warren Emery in 1897. Emery sold it to Edwin H. Smith in 1907. Smith later sold it to Chauncey Bryant (1852-1934) who owned the store on the corner of High and Main and lived in the Mechanic Street house next to the former Richardson mill lot. The next owner of the property was William C. Bryant who inherited it from his father. William C. transferred it to his son Myron on October 2, 1934. Myron sold it to Ruth Carver Ames in 1951 who built the present station on the site. Originally a Shell filling station operated for many years by Charles ("Pete") Chapin, it is today owned by D. W. Small of Ellsworth and offers Texaco products.

2. Pearline McMillin's house once had an adjoining blacksmith shop. In Eva Bean's notes she records that in 1867 William L. Chapman (1841-1932) sold his dwelling on High Street to Estes, the jeweler. Not much is known until 1886 when Albert C. Frost (1864-1927) acquired the property for \$900. For many years he operated the blacksmith shop until he sold the premises to Wallace Warren in 1921. In 1917 the house was sold to Fritz Goddard (1863-1929) whose son Claude died in a much-discussed accident at Riverside Cemetery. The property remained in the Goddard family until 1935 when it was sold to Harold Lurvey. Later title passed to Olive Lurvey, longtime teacher in the local schools,



Looking up High Street from Main Street, c. 1910

who in 1943 also bought the blacksmith shop from Wallace Warren. This was razed in 1946. Since 1943 the house and shop site have been under one owner. Olive Lurvey sold the premises to Roderick A. McMillin in 1955 and his widow owns and occupies the house today.

Prior to 1886, W. D. Hastings may have been on this site as a blacksmith before moving to the former Dilloway Shop across Main Street now owned by Dale Thurston. The shop building was apparently completed in 1893 according to an item in the *Oxford Democrat*: "Frost's blacksmith shop is near completed and makes a fine addition to High Street. The shop is cool, roomy and light and affords opportunity to all kinds of iron work."

Olive Lurvey offered board and room in a private home to the public here in 1940.

3. The Jacklyn Roberts house has had numerous owners and renters. The first mention of this property that has been documented is Gilman Chapman's deed to Henry C. Barker for \$100 in 1883. Barker sold it to Chauncey Bryant who had a shop on this spot about 1886. Bryant sold the property to

(Continued on page 2)

1984 ENDOWMENT CAMPAIGN

At press time the 1984 Endowment Campaign of the Bethel Historical Society had collected \$5000 toward meeting the \$7000 goal. To date over 270 individuals and businesses have contributed to assist the Society in meeting future needs. A complete list will appear in the next issue of the *Courier*. Anyone wishing to help the Society meet the 1984 goal should make his or her tax deductible contribution payable to the Bethel Historical Society and forward it to P.O. Box 12, Bethel, Maine 04217.

Louisa Lowe of Newry in 1893 for \$500. Lowe sold it to Thomas Kendall in 1904 for \$400. The next year Kendall transferred it to Henry S. Jodrey who sold it to Bion F. Brown in 1911. From Brown title passed to Curtis P. Hutchinson in 1923. Hutchinson sold it to Fred L. Edwards (1865-1947) in 1932 who rented it to a number of persons. Among those living here during this time were Sidney and Verna Dyke, Charles and Marjorie Freeman, the Wermenchucks, Earl Eldridge and Alzena Lord. Edwards sold to P. H. Chadbourne Company in 1946 and in 1949 the property was acquired by Earlyn D. and Alta M. Crouse. Later Earlyn Crouse became sole owner (1960) and transferred it to his daughter, the present owner.

4. Ruth Lord's house was built after 1892 since it was that year that Loranzie C. Lary of Gorham, New Hampshire sold the land to Mary Frost. She later sold the house and other buildings to Fred L. Edwards in 1908 who that same year transferred the premises to Chauncey Bryant. The following year Bryant sold this property for \$1100 to Harriet W. Stowell. Three years later in 1912, Harriet Stowell, then living in Yarmouth, Maine, conveyed the property to Annie W. Heath who for many years fed the homeless at the Bethel Lock-Up across the street. From Annie Heath's estate the property passed to Herbert P. Swan in 1936. From the Swan family it was sold to Ruth Lord in 1967. Mrs. Lord, a member of the Bethel Historical Society, operates a beauty shop here today.

5. Geneva McCoy's house was moved from the corner of Church and High Streets in 1893. It was sold in 1907 to Harry H. Brown (1876-1951) for \$700. Brown, a barber and father of the late Society member Albert Brown, sold the property to Lloyd Luxton in 1925. Luxton sold the property to James and Eva Johnston in 1961. Their daughter owns the premises today and operates a beauty shop, Cherie's Beauty Salon, from this site. Arthur and Eva Glines Herrick's daughter Kathryn was born in this house in 1913 during the period that the Herrick family lived here.

6. Alzena Sargent's house was built in 1892 according to an item in the *Oxford Democrat* for June 21 of that year: "Eben S. Kilborn has the foundation in for a house on High Street. C. H. Adams has charge." As the summer progressed other reports can be found in the pages of the *Democrat*: "E. S. Kilborn is erecting a house on High Street and has it well underway (August 20, 1892)." By the fall, the house must have been completed since the *Democrat* records in the October 25, 1892 issue: "Mr. C. H. Adams is building a stable in connection with the house just erected for E. S. Kilborn on High Street." Kilborn was one of Bethel's more substantial men leaving at his death in 1940 an estate worth over \$200,000. His widow Joan S. Kilborn authored a book *Over the Horizon* published in 1950 which contains a revealing section on Bethel town characters. Eben Kilborn sold the property on High Street to Nellie Davis in 1904. Her husband Charles long operated a farm machinery business on High Street and also sold ice. In 1932 the couple celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. They had two children, Guy, who died in 1920 and Maud, who married Robert Wormell, a well-known local cattle dealer. Maud Wormell sold her family's home to Viola Luxton in 1953. Her daughter Alzena owns and occupies the house today.

7. The Gould Academy faculty house at the corner of High and Elm Streets has long been occupied by Society life member Alvin Barth and family. It was built after 1867 by Henry C. and Ellen Barker who purchased the land in that year for \$175. In 1885 it was sold to Daniel Straw Hastings

(1840-1925) who transferred it to Addie Van in 1912. Mrs. Van sold it to Gladys Buck Hall in 1940. It was purchased from Mrs. Hall by Gould Academy for faculty housing in 1955. Gould faculty and wives who have lived here were Wendell and Ruth Brewster, Julian Thompson, William and Margaret Davis Crosbie, Timothy and Judy Kersey. When E. R. Bowdoin was Superintendent of Schools (1930-35) he lived here. Wilma Hall Quimby also had a beauty shop in this house in the 1940s.

8. The origins of the former Home Economics Cottage now the Owen Art Gallery Building extend back to 1861 when Stephen Estes sold the lot to Richard H. Meserve. Meserve conveyed the property to Isadore M. Timberlake in 1879. Six years later in 1885 Timberlake sold the premises to William P. Godwin. For \$1500 Godwin transferred the property to Albert F. Farwell who sold it to Anna M. Farwell in 1900. She sold the property to Hannah Demerritt in 1906 who sold it to John M. Martin of Milan, New Hampshire. During the Martin ownership of the property it was rented to a number of families. Among those living here during this period were Benjamin and Anna Kimball, Fred and Merlie Wheeler, Lloyd and Irene Luxton. The Martins sold the property to Gould Academy in 1916 and in the 1920s through the 1960s it was used for home economics, manual training and music. In the 1970s it became the Art Cottage and was later renovated and dedicated to longtime Gould faculty member James B. Owen.

9. According to the 1858 Atlas a house bordered High Street adjacent to the Academy building labeled "A. Merrill," probably Amos M. Merrill, who is listed in the 1860 census as married to Susanna Merrill. Both are aged 47 in that year. Amos Merrill's occupation is listed as stage conductor; his real and personal estates were estimated to be valued at \$1000 each. The 1880 Atlas lists a "C. H. Grover" (probably Charles H. Grover who with his wife Caroline E. and daughter Lillian are listed here in the 1880 federal census). The *Oxford Democrat* for August 1, 1893 records that "C. M. Wormell bought of the trustees of Gould's Academy the Grover house, situated on the corner of Church and High Streets." The house was moved down High Street and is currently the beauty shop of Geneva McCoy.

10. Across High Street on the opposite corner of High and Church Streets stood a house for which the earliest deeds that have been found record its sale from George Roberts to Emma Foster in 1868 for \$400. Later Emma Manning transferred ownership to Mary A. Merrill in 1889. Mary Merrill sold it to Ann Burbank in 1906. In 1909, Eliphalet Rowe transferred it to John Kimball who sold the property to Philip S. Chapman. It was from Chapman that Leslie E. Davis (1892-1961) acquired the premises and lived there for several years. In 1929, Davis sold the property to William Rogers Chapman (1855-1935), Bethel's famed music conductor. From the Chapman estate it was sold to Gould Academy in 1952. The house was razed prior to 1955 to make way for the Walters Infirmary on the site today.

Families who rented the house during its existence include Joel Swett's widow, the Ben Brown family, Henry and Leona Flint, John and Verna Carter, the Earle Palmer family, Mae McCrae, Norman and Ruth Ford, Sidney and Verna Dyke, Charles and Nancy Swan and Frank and Maude Hunt.

In 1954, the March town meeting at Odeon Hall was the scene for a heated discussion on the issue of closing High Street between Elm and Church streets. When the issue was put to a vote those favoring the closing prevailed by a narrow margin, 46-42.

11. The Bethel Grammar School site was sold to Gould

Academy in 1951. The Brick School, built in 1893-94, cost \$6000. In 1951 it was appraised for less than \$10,000 but William Bingham II (1879-1955), hearing that the new Crescent Park School needed \$60,000 to complete financing, paid that amount for the High Street property which would be adjacent to the Academy. It was razed in 1955.

Prior to the town's ownership of the property it was owned by John Philbrook who built and lived in the Queen Anne style house on Main Street. Philbrook had purchased the land of Mary G. Chapman who had obtained it from Sabrina C. Johnson.

Among the teachers who served here were: Gwen Stearns, Floribel Haines, Jennie Mann, Hermione Hutchins, Herbert Bean, Olive Lurvey, Electa Chapin, Elizabeth Beeaker, Frances Babb, Ina Potter, Ruth Carver Ames, Doris Lord, Arthur Herrick, Gwendolyn Holt, Lillian Bartlett, Maud Harrington, Molly Davis, Charles Chapman, Ruth Hastings, Helen Varner, Omar Drummond, Ethel Bisbee, Thelma Van, Mina Stevens, Elizabeth Wight, Marguerite Quinn and Dorothy Goodnow.

12. The present Gould parking lot was once the site of a house moved from Main Street by John Philbrook in 1892. It appears to have been a twin of the former Tibbetts house (now owned by Karen Brown) on Main Street and stood where John Philbrook built his landmark Queen Anne style house, now commonly referred to as the Bennett House.

Philbrook continued to own the house for a time after its transfer to High Street then it was sold to Frank and Blanche Flint. The Flints sold it to Earl Davis in 1928. He and his family lived here for many years until selling it to Gould Academy in 1951. It was razed for the parking lot in 1954. Upstairs tenants of the Davis family were Mr. & Mrs. Harry Lawin, Mr. & Mrs. Hanno Packard, Mr. & Mrs. Clayton Fossett, Nan Griggs, Helen Varner, Blanche Howe, Mr. & Mrs. Richard Young, and Mr. & Mrs. Avon Severance.

E. B. Jackson was apparently living here in 1892. Fifty years later in 1942, Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Dolan and son were occupying the upstairs rent in the Davis house. He was a member of the border patrol during World War II.

13. Charles L. Davis took over the Bethel agency for John Deere farm implements and Old's gasoline engines in 1908 and installed his business in this barn purchased from John Philbrook. Later Asher Runnells operated a machine shop here in the 1940s. The building was demolished about 1960.

14. The Lock-Up building was constructed in 1890 with a town appropriation of \$500 which was exceeded by \$85.75. Long used to house transients it was closed in 1939 and razed in 1960. Society member Norris Brown recalls that the building had a stove and two cells. Annie Heath and later Carrie Merrill provided food for the homeless here for many years.

15. Next stood a row of seven garages, probably built in the 1920s at the same time as the Naimey Block on Main Street. They were later owned by Harold Chamberlin who sold them to Norman Grieg, Richard Bryant acquired them from Norman Grieg about 1963 and they were demolished to make way for the parking lot for the new Bryant's market which opened in 1964.

16. Calvin Bisbee constructed a two story building on High Street in 1902 according to an item in the *Bethel News* for September 24 of that year. It was first occupied as a machine shop by Herrick Brothers who moved their business from West Bethel. In 1908 they transferred the business to new quarters on lower Main Street. Buckman's Repair Shop

was here in the 1920s followed by A. H. Gibbs' Garage in the 1930s. During this period the building became for a short time the site of Barney's Saloon. It was later acquired by Ruth Carver Ames who sold it to Roderick S. McMillin (1913-1971) in 1944. After Mr. McMillin's death his widow Pearline sold it to John E. Grover in 1972 who demolished the structure for additional parking space in connection with his motel operations.

17. Between the previous building and Bryant's Market stood the lower corporation building and a barber shop building with a pool hall facing High Street. The corporation building was long the site of storage for fire apparatus. Upstairs was an apartment which had various tenants including Guy and Nina Crouse. The corporation building was sold to Hugh Thurston in 1946 for \$2250. Nina Crouse recalls that after the fire equipment was removed the space was used as a second hand store. Both buildings were demolished in 1968 to make way for the new Casco bank that stands on the site today.

18. On the site of the parking lot of Casco Northern Bank was once Bryant's Market established on this spot in 1886 by Chauncey Bryant who founded the business in 1876. Succeeding generations added to the building, son William, (1877-1950), grandson Myron (1902-1961) and great-grandson Richard. A new Bryant's Market was built further up Main Street in 1964, now the Bethel IGA.

Except possibly for Main Street no Bethel street has changed as much as High Street. Gone are so many of the landmarks that made it unique — the shops, garages, the Lock-Up, and the Brick Grammar School — besides the homes. Gone too is the upper portion of the street between Elm and Church which made such good sliding in the winter.

High Street continues to be both a commercial and residential street. Its commercial heritage continues with the two beauty shops, a pale legacy from what in 1900 must have been a bustling commercial center. Nonetheless it is home to some dozen individuals as it was to such people from Bethel's past as Annie Heath and Fritz Goddard.

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

Jean Barker lives in Delray Beach, Florida.

Carlton and Mary Champe are retired and live in Rumford Center, Maine.

Donald and Dorothy Christie are retired and live in Gray, Maine. He was for many years Superintendent of Schools in Bethel.

IN MEMORIAM

Died, September 7, 1984, John T. Gotjen of Warren, Rhode Island, contributing member of the Society.

Died, September 27, 1984, Enoch W. Hunt II of Franklin, North Carolina, a Society member since 1977.

SOCIETY OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES

Alden T. Kennett, President; Marvin Ouwinga, Vice President; Theresa C. Judson, Secretary and Clerk of the Trustees; Margaret Joy Tibbetts, Treasurer; Trustees: Willard Wight, Persis Post, Ruth Wight, Donald Bennett, and Mary Keniston.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

As spokesman for the newly elected officers I would like to voice the opinion that the former officers will be a hard act to follow. However, we will try to live up to the high standards they have set for us.

It is gratifying to come on board at a time when our second large reprinting project is well underway. At this time the republication of *East Bethel Road* is nearly ready for the printers. I firmly believe that this type of project should be a continuing part of our activities.

It is my hope that we will continue to expand the use of our outstanding facilities by the educational community. I have personally been involved with some of the school groups that have visited the museum and it was very rewarding to see how interested students are in its activities. I feel the use of the archives by older students could also be increased through special programs and cooperative efforts. It would also be good to see even more use of the archives by adults. I often wonder how many people realize that the links to genealogical societies such as the Mayflower Society, Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution or Founders and Patriots may lay hidden in one of our volumes. All it sometimes takes is a little looking to be eligible for one or more of these societies.

This Society is blessed with many talented and interesting people with various skills and interests. Last year at our annual Heritage Day observance in February we had fourteen craft demonstrations and exhibits going on at the same time throughout the museum. Many larger communities would be hard pressed to match the diversity of interest within our ranks. I hope we will continue to offer this high level of quality in this kind of "living" demonstration of these oldtime crafts.

Alden T. Kennett

OUR READERS WRITE

From Society member Harold Lawrence of Portland who writes that he always enjoys receiving the "*Bethel Courier*" and wished to share the following story in response to the article on Bethel during the Civil War:

"Mrs. Ellen Merrill told me many years ago that Edmund Merrill, Sr. went to Norway to enlist in the Norway company but was not accepted because of his age. He returned to Bethel, dyed his hair and then went to Portland where the companies were and assembled to form the first Maine Regiment of Infantry.

Official records disclose that he was accepted and enlisted 25 April 1861 for two years, and mustered into Federal service for three months at Portland, Maine 3 May 1861 as a musician in Company G (Norway), First Maine Regiment of Infantry.

He was mustered out and honorably discharged from the service of the United States as a musician, 5 August 1861 at Portland by reason of mustering out of the organization.

His military service on file in the State Archives, records him as being born in Fayette, Maine, a resident of Bethel, Maine. He was 59 years old, five feet and nine inches in height, light complexion, blue eyes, gray hair, and by occupation a house carpenter."

Lillian Kelly Bomhoff of Mendham, New Jersey writes: "I am eagerly looking forward to receiving this book (*East Bethel Road*). I think of the Bethel I knew of fifty-seven years ago — and I enjoy so much reading the *Bethel Courier*. I am especially pleased to find some pictures included in this summer's issue. I follow news of the fine work of the Society (via the *Courier*) with avid interest. I am most happy to be member."

A letter to Margaret Joy Tibbetts from Gwilym R. Roberts of Farmington reads in part:

"My purpose in writing is to let you know how much I enjoyed your article on Bethel in the Great Depression. I have seldom seen anything like it done on a Maine town, and it raised many memories in me. Being a few years older than you, I remember going by the little lockup in Brownville on those occasions when there was an unfortunate inmate there, but I do not know that anyone ever has studied the number of tramps there during the depression . . . The whole question as to how badly Maine towns suffered during the depression has interested me for a long time. Agnes Mantor, teaching history here (University of Maine at Farmington) at the time, always claimed that there was not much suffering. A fellow assigned by me to study Rumford during the depression claimed he could find little evidence in the *Rumford Falls Times* that a depression was going on."

ANNUAL MEETING HELD SEPTEMBER 6

The 19th annual meeting of the Society was held on September 6 with the usual pot luck supper supervised by the Special Projects Committee preceding it.

During the business portion of the meeting Treasurer Margaret Joy Tibbetts reported that the Society was in sound financial health. The nominating committee consisting of Ernest Perkins, Edith Robertson and retiring trustee Catherine Newell reported on the following slate: President, Alden T. Kennett; Vice President, Marvin Ouwinga; Secretary, Theresa Judson; Treasurer, Margaret Joy Tibbetts; Trustees for three years Donald G. Bennett and Mary C. Keniston. Outgoing president Donald Bennett praised the retiring trustees Catherine Newell and Ronald Snyder for many contributions to the Society. Trustee Board Chairman Margaret Joy Tibbetts expressed appreciation for the fine record of service of retiring president Donald Bennett and retiring secretary Mary Keniston.

President Bennett outlined some of the highlights of the past year including the addition of more than 100 new members, the acquisition of a large number of artifacts to the Society's collection, the restoration of the Twitchell portraits completed with a grant from the Maine State Commission on the Arts and Humanities, a successful endowment campaign that exceeded the \$5500 goal by more than \$1000 from 265 donors, an innovative course "Grass Roots History" for high school students, the reprinting of the 1880 atlas maps of Bethel and the embarkation of the republication of Eva Bean's *East Bethel Road*.

SPECIAL OFFER

Thomas Hubka's BIG HOUSE, LITTLE HOUSE, BACK HOUSE, BARN (see review page 8) regularly \$35 is on sale while the supply lasts for \$27.50 (Society member price \$24.75) plus \$1 postage. Write P.O. Box 12, Bethel, ME 04217 and make checks payable to the Bethel Historical Society.

MARTHA FIFIELD WILKINS AND BETHEL

Thanks to the generosity of Society member Doris Fifield Wilkins of Clearwater, Florida, the Society's collections of local history and genealogy were greatly enhanced earlier this year with a gift of photographs, letters, hand-written family histories, and artifacts, collected and compiled by her mother, Martha Fifield Wilkins. In connection with this gift, the Society's June meeting featured an evening of slides entitled, "Ketchum, Bethel, and Vicinity — The photographs of Martha Fifield Wilkins" presented by Society member Randall H. Bennett who edited and published a collection of Mrs. Wilkins' notes as *Sunday River Sketches: A New England Chronicle* in 1977. Bennett traveled to Florida in 1978 and again in 1983; while there, he and Doris Fifield Wilkins examined the voluminous collections preserved after Martha F. Wilkins' death in 1963, with the thought of returning to Maine those items of particular significance to the Bethel area.

During her active lifetime, Martha Fifield Wilkins donated numerous photographs (all labeled!) and written records regarding Bethel and surrounding communities to the Maine Historical Society and other regional organizations; her own notes on the Sunday River Valley were deposited at the Bethel Public Library in 1947 and are on permanent loan to the Society. The new gift to the Society includes numerous photographs and tintypes of Bethel area scenes, buildings, and people, copies of hand-written genealogies highlighting several early Bethel families, and artifacts relating especially to Martha Fifield Wilkins' ancestors in Bethel, Newry and "Ketchum" (Riley Plantation).

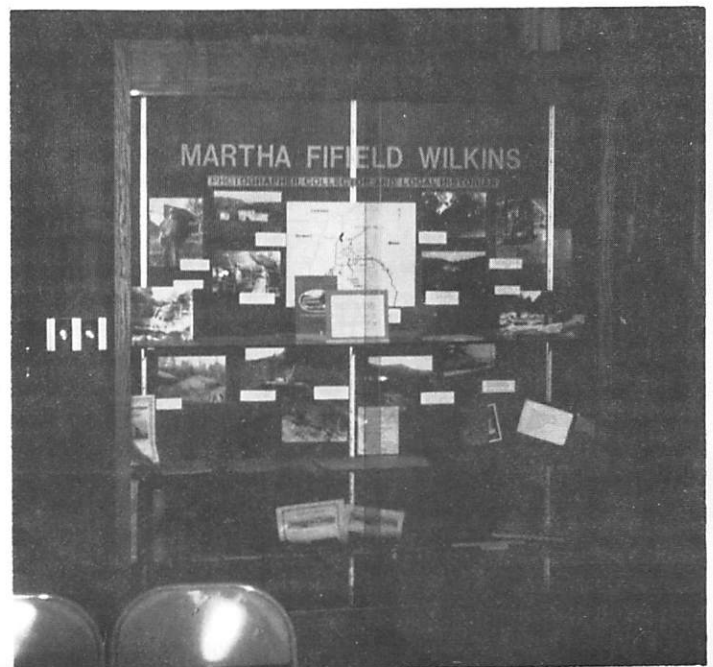
Though born in Methuen, Massachusetts in 1879, Martha Fifield Wilkins had strong family ties with the Bethel region. Her father, Roscoe Alonzo Fifield, was born in nearby Riley Plantation in 1848, and her mother, Lucelia Elizabeth Chapman, was born that same year in the town of Newry. In addition, Martha Fifield Wilkins was a direct descendent of two of Bethel's most prominent early settlers — Benjamin Russell, Sr., the first town clerk, and the Reverend Eliphaz Chapman, who suggested the name "Bethel" at the town's incorporation in 1796.

Martha Fifield Wilkins grew up with a fascination in, and admiration for, the former home of her parents on Sunday River where she would spend over thirty summers of her life. She attended Methuen High School, graduating in 1896 and entered Cannon Commercial College, Lawrence, Mass., where she became an able student in calligraphy. Having aptitude and interest in art, she entered the Massachusetts College of Art (then called the Massachusetts Normal Art School), graduating from a four-year course in 1901. During her travels she became acquainted with the Methuen Methodist minister's son, Benson Perley Wilkins, and in October of 1901 they were married. Immediately after the ceremony, they took a train to Bethel and spent several weeks in the area, with a home-base at the Alonzo Fifield farmstead in "Ketchum." The following year a daughter, their only child, was born. Martha Wilkins' husband, a graduate himself of the Boston University School of Theology, often changed parishes; thus the family resided for periods in Smithtown, Greenland, Newport, and Groveton, N.H., Methuen again, and then Keene Valley, N.Y. Here, the Reverend Wilkins' health failed necessitating retirement in 1916, whereupon the family settled in Carlisle, Massachusetts, to occupy for thirty years one of the town's oldest homes.

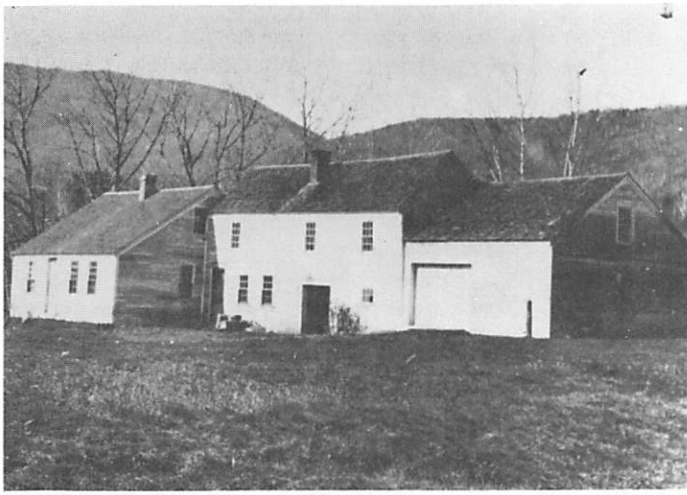
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Martha Fifield Wilkins (1879-1963)



Part of the Society's summer exhibit highlighting the collections of Martha Fifield Wilkins.



The Fifiel-Bennett-Littlehale House at Riley Plantation about 1905. Built by O. Israel B. Fifiel in the early 1830s, the house was one of the first framed structures raised in this now-wilderness area. For many years, it served as the "Ketchum" Post Office.

Historical research on a local level had always been one of Martha Fifiel Wilkins' hobbies, and at Carlisle became, in her own words, "a serious pursuit." In 1941 she presented the Gleason Library at Carlisle with twenty-five notebooks on the "Old Houses and Families of Carlisle, Massachusetts." These volumes, largely in her own fine handwriting, contained, among other things, four hundred and ninety-five photographs. From Carlisle, the family moved to Durham, N.H. While here, Mrs. Wilkins assembled the material on the Sunday River Valley (including copies of the only known records for Riley Plantation) which she eventually presented to the Bethel Library.

Martha and her daughter were constant companions, especially in light of the Reverend Wilkins' poor health; they took a two-month tour of the country by rail and later spent a year traveling the southwest and Mexico with headquarters in El Paso, Texas. At the age of seventy, Martha Fifiel Wilkins accompanied her daughter on a professional sojourn to Melbourne, Australia, taking a cargo ship from N.Y. via the Panama Canal, arriving in Australia eight weeks later. The return home to Durham in 1954 was by way of the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Suez Canal and across Europe. Two more moves came soon thereafter — Brookline, Mass., in 1956 and Worcester, in 1960. In 1961 Reverend Benson P. Wilkins, long confined due to illness, died, and at Worcester, in 1963, Martha Fifiel Wilkins' productive life came to an end.

During the Society's June meeting, the slide program featured biographical highlights of Mrs. Wilkins' life, as well as views reproduced from her own large collection of area photographs. Of special interest to the large crowd in attendance were the White Mountain, Bethel, and Sunday River Valley scenes, many of which included individuals and historical structures that have passed from the scene. The accompanying exhibit, arranged by Randall Bennett, contained a fascinating assortment of photographs, books, family mementos, and interpretive matter, all documenting Martha Fifiel Wilkins' long career as a regional historian and painstaking researcher.

Thanks to her meticulous recording of events and people, along with her daughter's concern for the preservation of the materials themselves, current researchers and Bethel enthusiasts have been left a rich legacy from which to experience the past.

The supply of Martha Fifiel Wilkins' SUNDAY RIVER SKETCHES is nearly exhausted. Copies can still be obtained from the Society for \$15.75 to non-members and the member price is \$14.18. Please add \$1 for postage and handling and make checks payable to the Bethel Historical Society. The address is P.O. Box 12, Bethel, Maine 04217.



Alden and Ed Kennett begin the process of erecting a post and beam building at the annual Sudbury Canada Days, August 11 and 12, an outstanding craft demonstration during the two day event, which featured many old-time crafts. Other events included a children's parade, children's games, flower show, historical film series, art show, horse-shoe and croquet tournaments, variety show, bean supper, old fashioned church service at the West Parish Congregational Church and a concert at the Middle Intervale Meeting House.

EDITOR'S CORNER

With this issue begins a new feature in the *Courier*, a member profile. Since the Society is blessed with so many outstanding volunteers who have made contributions to its success and progress, it seems only proper to honor one in each issue. I hope this will be a popular feature.

This issue also includes our International Standard Serials Number (ISSN: 0747-9108) which reflects the recognition this publication has received from major libraries and repositories. This number will make future issues easier to catalog.

SRH

NEW SOCIETY VICE PRESIDENT

Marvin Ouwinga, new Society vice president elected at the annual meeting, was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the son of a clergyman. He attended schools in Detroit, Michigan, Denver, Colorado and in the Chicago area before graduating from Calvin College in Grand Rapids with a major in history and philosophy. During his college years he married a fellow student Tineka Zwolsman who had emigrated to Canada from the Netherlands. They are now the parents of two children. He taught high school in Hamilton, Ontario and then entered the graduate school of Indiana University where he received his Ph.D. in history. He taught five years at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. Since 1976 he has been associated with Gould Academy where he is a history and Latin teacher. He also serves on the World Service Committee of the West Parish Congregational Church.

SOCIETY HOSTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXHIBIT

During the month of October the Society hosted a traveling exhibit on prehistoric hunters and gatherers of northern Maine. Entitled "Early Peoples in Northern Maine" the exhibit was prepared at the Center for the Study of Early Man at the University of Maine at Orono. It was funded by the Maine Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Based on investigations conducted at Munsungun Lake, north of Baxter State Park by a team of archaeologists and other scientists from the University of Maine at Orono, the exhibit focused on life among prehistoric hunters and gatherers some 11,000 years ago.

NEW SOCIETY SECRETARY AND CLERK OF THE TRUSTEES

At the annual meeting of the Society Theresa C. Judson was elected Secretary and Clerk of the Trustees. She was born in Canadian, Texas, the daughter of Ellswick R. and Elizabeth Katherine Hargrave Cloyd. Following high school and two years of college she married William H. Judson, who is currently the town manager of Bethel. A professional secretary, Mrs. Judson is employed by Thompson Associates Insurance in Bethel. The mother of two children she has also served as a volunteer for the Society cataloging slides for the past two years.



Barbara Herrick Brown at work in her flower garden.

MEMBER PROFILE

As the Society completes ten years of operations in the Dr. Moses Mason House, it is particularly appropriate that we honor Barbara Herrick Brown. For the past decade she has kept the museum supplied with fresh flowers throughout the museum season and for special Society events. These flowers are always expertly and attractively arranged. That in itself is a major contribution but she has given even more time and talent to the Society by her role in the annual flower show during Sudbury Canada Days. She also demonstrates dried flower arrangements during Heritage Days and provides harvest arrangements for the annual homecoming. She attends most Society meetings and special events. She is in short, a dedicated and enthusiastic Society member with a long record of service.

Mrs. Brown was born in Bethel in 1914 the daughter of Arthur and Eva Glines Herrick. She graduated from Gould Academy in 1931 and received her R.N. from Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, Boston in 1935. She married Norris Brown in 1937 and is the mother of two daughters. For approximately thirty years she worked as a nurse. Active in the West Parish Congregational Church and in the Bethel Senior Citizens where she currently serves as secretary, Mrs. Brown enjoys a variety of craft activities and gardening in her retirement.

Join the Bethel Historical Society dedicated to preserving and interpreting the local past.

Membership in the Society entitles you to:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) free admission to the museum | (5) quarterly newsletter |
| (2) special discounts at museum store | (6) reduced course fees |
| (3) preferred rate for meeting room rental | (7) voting rights in the Society |
| (4) special library and archival privileges | (8) special invitations to Society occasions |

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BOOK REVIEW

Thomas C. Hubka, *BIG HOUSE, LITTLE HOUSE, BACKHOUSE, BARN: THE CONNECTED FARM BUILDINGS OF NEW ENGLAND* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1984) 226 pp., \$35.

Thomas C. Hubka, Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Oregon, has produced an engaging study of New England's rural architecture. He has attempted to answer the seemingly perennial question of why New England farm buildings constructed in the latter half of the nineteenth century were often connected. He also points out that while this phenomenon characterizes most New England farm homesteads it is not common in the areas of the American Midwest where many New Englanders migrated. The title of this book is taken from a children's song of the late nineteenth century and is particularly appropriate to the book's subject.

Hubka's study is skillfully organized into three parts. The first provides an instructive overview of the nature of connected farm buildings; the second contains the main body of the text dealing with the construction, usage and changing fashions over time; the third deals with the confounding question of why they were built. The book is extensively illustrated with sketches by the author, copies of prints from agricultural periodicals of the nineteenth century and a wide variety of photographs both contemporary and from the 1860s through the turn of the century (several from the collection of the Bethel Historical Society). It also contains a wealth of documentation with an extensive bibliography and a useful glossary of terms and index.

The author has faced a complex problem of architecture interpreted through an awareness of ethnology and popular culture in the nineteenth century. He has traced the development of farm buildings from the eighteenth century to the early years of the twentieth. His particular focus has been south/southwestern Maine and eastern New Hampshire but New England references (particularly northern) appear throughout the work. It is his contention documented by several case studies including ones in North Yarmouth, Kennebunk and Sweden, Maine that uncertain economic circumstances and the impetus to the "modern" (as opposed to popular notions of the effect of the harsh winter climate) effectively combined to change the landscape of New England.

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These connected buildings, both modest and substantial, Hubka maintains were constructed (and buildings often moved to reflect this tendency) with careful attention to such details as the location of yards (side, barn, front, work) to avoid northern exposures. In addition, the author spends considerable time differentiating the various specializations that outbuildings began to take, particularly from about 1850 to 1900. There is even a section on how farm kitchens changed after 1850 with the significant addition of the cook stove.

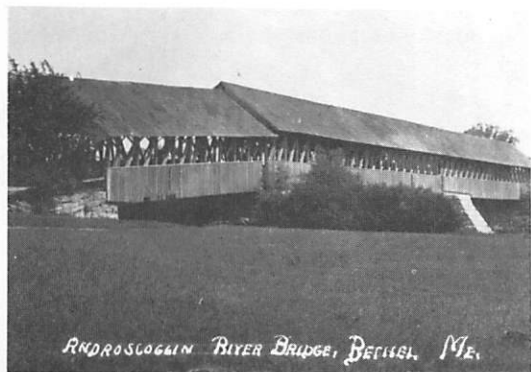
This is a useful book since little has been previously written along these lines that can be found in one volume. Specialists may argue on particular details, the use of evidence, the conclusions drawn or how reflective this book really is of the reality of nineteenth century rural New England life, but Hubka has made a significant contribution to regional history with this pioneering study.

SRH

ADAMS CHRONICLES FILM SERIES

Through a grant from the Maine Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities The Society was able to host the first six films in the series "The Adams Chronicles" this fall. Based on the Adams Papers, which contain 300,000 pages of letters, diaries and journals written by members of the family, the series weaves together events that shaped the history of the United States and the legacy of this distinguished American family. The remaining seven films in the series covering the lives of John Quincy Adams (who served in Congress with Dr. Moses Mason), Charles Francis Adams, Brooks Adams and Henry Adams will be featured in the spring.

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